

# Challenges And Prospects Of Staff Development Programmes In Nigeria's Secondary School System: An Overview

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## ABSTRACT

*The vices rampant now among students in Nigeria secondary schools, such as acts of indiscipline, stealing, cheating, truancy, rioting, cultism, and raping, together with population explosion, call for special skills on the part of the school administrators to be able to cope with these challenges. Consequently, this paper examines the uniqueness of the principals' position to make or mar the image of the educational system and the need for these principals to be well equipped to meet these challenges in the educational system of the third world, with particular reference to Nigeria. This is so because it is now clear that the pre-service skills acquired by present school administrators, through formal education, may not be adequate to meet with these sustainable challenges. Recommendations on probable improvement of these staff development programmes for effective and efficient performance of these principals on their jobs concluded this paper.*

**Keywords:** Rampant vices among students in Nigeria; educational system of the third world; Various staff development programmes in Nigeria; Challenges in the Nigeria educational system

## INTRODUCTION

The principal of a secondary school in Nigeria “occupies a unique position in the educational system” (Fafunwa, 1971). Fafunwa sees the principal as an educational leader whose influence is considerable in the educational programme. The principal, therefore, being a leader, an administrator and educator, is a dominant force in the outcome of the secondary school's total instructional and managerial programmes. For these principals to be able to play their vital roles successfully, they must be fully equipped to meet the challenges evident in the third world educational system. Unfortunately, the school principals in this part of the world were appointed, not necessarily on the basis of their professional attainments, but basically on their job experiences. Their effectiveness or efficiencies in the performance of their duties becomes questionable when they exhibit lack of adequate competence.

It is envisaged that, with the changes in the educational system in the third world, the call for a new orientation of these principals toward their participation in staff development programmes is inevitable.

The importance of the staff development needs of these secondary school principals was emphasized by Shanon (2001) when he wrote, “*It has become abundantly clear that the schools of education alone cannot provide the multi-disciplinary academic and practical base needed to further the professional education of school administrators.*” In essence, Shanon was saying that for the school administrators to be able to cope with the challenges affecting that position, the pre-service training acquired by them would not be sufficient, hence the vital need for on-the-job training.

## CONCEPT OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

“Staff development may take place any time as full time or part time study during the potentially continuous professional life of the administrator” (Johnston, 2004). In other words, while the pre-service training is

usually concentrated in a number of years before the start of the teacher's or administrator's professional career, staff development is expected to start with and continue throughout a person's teaching or administrative career as the need arises, which may or may not be in a concentrated structured fashion. In a very broad sense, the term staff development has been defined by Hass (2001) as "all activities engaged in by professional personnel during their service and designed to contribute to improvement on the job". Harris (2001) has defined 'staff development' as "planned activities for the instructional improvement of staff members".

### **IMPORTANCE OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

Every day new ideas are being brought to bear on educational practice; therefore, principals have to keep up to date by attending staff development programme courses. Staff development training will be beneficial to both the principals and the school system.

With regard to its benefit to principals, staff development training is important for the following reasons:

- will enable principals to obtain high academic and professional qualifications in order to improve on their positions in the school's organizational hierarchy
- helps principals acquire more conceptual and technical knowledge, skills and competencies in their system of administration in order to improve their efficiency in classroom instruction
- helps principals acquire academic and professional knowledge that will help them meet up with the present and future challenges of their primary functions
- helps principals to keep in touch with their counterparts and new developments within and outside the country for their professional growth
- helps to improve the social and academic status of principals in the society (Kreitner and Kinicki, 2004)

With regard to the school system, staff development training is important for the following reasons:

- reduces the incidences of turnover since principals, who have acquired high professional training, tend to stay longer in the teaching profession
- helps meet up with the new changes in the school system, the school structure, and staffing positions of schools
- enables the principals to be adequately equipped in implementing education policies that require new orientation, attitudes and skills for the changing society
- helps improve the quantitative and qualitative contributions of principals to the achievement of the goals of the school system

### **STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**

Staff development training is a process for continuous updating of principals' knowledge, skills and interests in their chosen fields. It is a means for continued professional growth, which include induction or orientation programs, workshops, conferences, seminars, continuous learning programmes, staff meetings and committee work.

#### **Induction Or Orientation**

Orientation programmes - or induction - could be for a new staff, transferred staff or old staff, depending on the purpose of the programme. Generally, orientation programmes for new principals are planned activities aimed at assisting the newly employed principals to understand the school environment and structure, the teachers' reference groups, and the school rules and regulations. These also include knowledge of their primary functions and the various types of school records, which their teachers are supposed to keep, and how to keep them. They should be told of the staff code of behaviour, which should include "absence from school; lateness, leaving school during working hours; duty roster, sending pupils on errands, attendance at school assembly and meetings, etc." (Rao, 2007). So, the main purpose of orientation - or induction programme - is to acquaint the new principals with their

primary functions, their rights and obligations in the school so that they could adjust positively and quickly to the school environment and their primary functions. It will also enable them work with confidence in the school and to derive personal gratification. As Baikie (2002) puts it, induction is “a planned effort by an academic institution to reduce problems experienced by new principals so that all their potentials can be directed to the work of the school while achieving positions and individual gratification”. In the same vein, Nayak and Rao (2004) defined induction as “a systematic organization’s effort to minimize problems confronting new personnel so that they can contribute maximally to the work of the school and, at the same time, realize personal and professional satisfaction”.

From the foregoing, induction or orientation for newly employed principals is an important staff development programme for their profession growth.

### **Workshops**

Ojelabi (2001) opined that a workshop is a planned session of discussion or practical work on a particular subject matter. It could also be regarded as a forum where a group of people share their knowledge and experiences on particular topics.

A workshop, therefore, may involve some discussions and demonstrations of new techniques of teaching some subjects or carrying out some projects. For a workshop to be effective, it must be well planned and the participants sufficiently informed of the purpose and what they have to bring to the workshop. It is usually a moderate-sized group where each person has a problem to solve that is closely related to his field. A skilled consultant works with each group.

One of the rewarding aspects of a workshop is the exchange or sharing of ideas or knowledge among the participants. That is why a workshop is generally regarded as the child-centered method of teaching. Therefore, it should be encouraged by the Ministry of Education as a means of improving the school principal’s skills, competencies and enhancing their professional growth.

### **Conferences**

Conferences are normally annual or bi-annual meetings of professional associations. It is during professional conferences that scholarly papers are presented by participants from various educational institutions in the country. Conference papers, which are usually based on an agreed theme and sub-themes, will help to increase the principal’s knowledge, skills, administrative and teaching experiences because some conference papers deal with reports of research findings on educational issues or practices.

Like seminars, conferences give practicing school administrators opportunities to write articles and participate in professional conferences, thereby improving their skills and competences in the day-to-day running of his school. Conferences give participants opportunities to question others and discuss ideas presented. It seems that principals in Nigeria are not generally interested in professional conferences. The lame excuse usually given by some of them is that they have not seen the need for one, as their employers are not keen about it. According to Ogunmeru (2004), it is therefore important that principals be encouraged to join academic or professional associations, which will promote their academic and administrative growth. They should try to read journals produced from professional conferences; but more importantly, the Ministry of Education should urge these school administrators to belong to professional associations and attend conferences. The school administrators should lead the way by belonging to some professional associations and participating in their annual and bi-annual conferences. The school administrators should initiate forming professional associations for teachers. Another way of encouraging school administrators to attend professional conferences is by asking school administrators to show evidence of attendance or participation in professional conferences for promotion to higher levels. This will make them strive to attend professional conferences and, if possible, present papers for journal publication of the associations.

## **Seminars**

Seminars are normally organized for professionals or personnel in organizations to keep them adequately informed of certain educational issues or development, which are vital to the performance of their primary functions and professional growth. The topics are generally chosen by the organizers who also commission or invite some resource people to prepare and/or present papers for the seminars. Unlike professional conferences where the presenter is given a few minutes to present his paper, papers at seminars are usually read by the presenter and discussed by the participants. Seminars could also be prepared in a book form and given to the participants, during the seminars. In this case, it will be easier for the participants from various schools to organize similar seminars in their respective schools (Singh and Sharma, 2004).

## **Continuous Learning Programmes**

This programme is organized during the long vacation when principals have time to attend lectures without leaving their staff members unattended to in the school. The quality of education that principals receive determines, to a large extent, the character and quality of the educational system. Thus, the quality of principals, in turn, determines the tempo of society and the quality of people educated for such a nation. No wonder Fafunwa (1974) observed that the quality of education in any country cannot rise above the quality of its teachers. Nwagwu (1998) opined that “In order to maintain a high level of academic excellence and bring about a society of bright and full opportunities for all citizens, administrators in our school system - be it at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels must avail themselves of these continuous learning programme opportunities”.

## **Staff Meetings**

A staff meeting may perform a useful staff development function, but it is generally used to acquaint staff with administrative procedures and policies.

## **Committee Work**

This is where a total of five to seven members work on a problem that would be impossible for the whole staff to tackle at the same time.

## **PROBLEMS IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**

- The negative attitudes held by educators toward staff development programmes are probably the first of several reasons for the current problems in staff development. This view was supported by Mullins (2002) when he pointed out the fact that “state and national studies conducted during the last five years consistently suggest that the majority of teachers, administrators, and college personnel are not satisfied with current staff development programmes.
- Sunita, (2000), writing on this issue, states, “*the most common defects reported are poor planning and organization, activities that are impersonal and unrelated to the day-to-day problems of participants, lack of participant (teacher and administrator) involvement in the planning and implementation of their service, inadequate needs assessment, and unclear objectives*”.
- The lack of follow-up in the classroom or job setting after training takes place is almost universal. Contributing Peretomode (2002) stressed, “*while educators are generally negative about current practice, nearly all teachers and administrators see in-service education as crucial to improve school programs and practice*”.
- Those responsible for the development of staff development training programmes for the staff seem to be what McGregor (1960) calls “Theory X administrators”.
- Another weakness is that most staff development training programmes focus upon what Riddley (2001) calls “Information Assimilation”; that is, “*someone presents ideas, principles, and/or skills for use on the job (information presented); then the participants explore the full meaning of these ideas and discuss applications for the work setting; and finally, the staff development training ends and the person goes back to his job to implement what was understood*”. This does not fit what we know about adults and adult learning.

- Most staff development programmes did not have clear objectives.
- The Ministry of Education has traditionally never allocated any sizeable amount of money for staff development of school administrators. This is unfortunate since public schools are labor intensive industries. Consequently, it now guarantees rapid obsolescence of these schools' most important and expensive asset – its administrators.
- There is a pervasive mystique that suggests that a local consultant may be less effective than one who comes from a great distance. Many capable consultants who work outside their own state are seldom requested to work in their own area or region.
- One of the major stumbling blocks to the continuation of staff development training is the demand for immediate results.
- Shortage of financial resources to implement new ideas, oppositions from the local community and the parents to the new ideas, lack of interest from colleagues, and school population explosion preventing the new ideas from working.
- In addition, lack of reward and opportunities for participants to experiment with new ideas can be a problem impeding the effective planning and execution of staff development training programme opportunities.

### **THE NEED FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**

The need for staff development programmes is large and will probably remain so for a number of reasons. Many school administrators currently holding positions have not had extended preparation and are therefore confronted with many problems that they are poorly prepared to meet, despite their pre-service education.

The vices rampant now among students in the third world secondary schools, such as acts of indiscipline, stealing, cheating, truancy, rioting, cultism and raping, together with population explosion, call for special skills on the part of the school administrators to be able to cope with these challenges.

The majority of the present principals of these third world secondary schools received their professional training to meet the challenges of their times, but as society changes, new challenges, problems and policies emerged in the administration and attainment of secondary school objectives. These secondary schools cannot change in ways that really matter unless educators, especially school administrators themselves, change.

There are several reasons providing an impetus for the need to develop employees while on the job:

- Academic programmes rarely adequately prepare candidates for their future positions and their accompanying responsibilities. Consequently, many persons enter their career with no practice and with no experience in using the tools of their profession (Hass, 2001).
- The presence of aging employees and the explosion of knowledge (Reddy, 2004) pointed out that with age, human beings suffer from diminished vitality, creativity and flexibility. Aging employees can be assisted to remain or again become vibrant, vital, productive, and pertinent through employee renewal activities.
- increasing heterogeneity of employees in organizations, which includes very young graduates - some from economically, culturally and educationally disadvantaged background
- public and organization's disenchantment with the quality of educational products and the rapidly changing society, continually expanding and developing technology and sometime restive community youths

### **PROSPECTS**

The following prospects are likely to help the present and prospective school administrators:

- to see the need for being up-to-date through their level of participation in staff development programmes
- It is hoped that it will help them to be able to cope with the various problems and challenges associated with the implementation of the educational policies and programmes.

- It is likely to provide solutions to the problems of educating the parents, societies, and school communities as to the far-reaching implications of the system of education in Nigeria.
- It might assist the school administrators in their perplexing problems of administration of schools in the face of acute shortage of personnel of the right quality and number.
- It is also hoped that it will help to solve the problem of shortage of the right caliber of principalship of schools needed, especially for the successful implementation of our educational system.
- All things being equal, this presentation is likely to provide solutions to the problems of how to cope with the management, supervision, and control of the heterogeneous collection of staff who assist the principal in his administration of school, as well as the problem of how to use, to their advantage, the meager resources of the school, both financially and materially.
- The Ministry of Education could, as a matter of importance, ensure that principals attend academic and professional seminars free of charge with attendance made compulsory.
- School administrators ensure that their teachers attend available academic and professional seminars for the improvement of their competencies in the primary functions in schools.

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**NOTES**